



January 23, 2022

Sermon Series:

Shining Forth: Seeing Jesus in a New Light

Fulfilled in Your Hearing

Pastor Shelley Cunningham

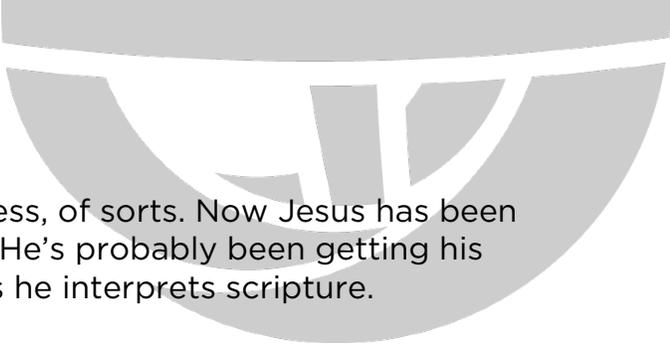
Luke 4:14-21 (NRSV)

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Last Thursday was Jan. 20 – inauguration day. We didn't have a presidential inauguration this year, of course, but it got me thinking of the power and promise that usually comes on those occasions.

The inaugural address is meant to set the tone for the years to come. It's a chance for the newly-elected official to share what they value, what they hope to do, and how they're going to unite those they lead. Now, most of these addresses wash over our ears and are remembered only in the historical archives.

But every once in a while, a word or phrase captures our imagination and becomes part of our story. Think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt lifting the spirits of the country in the midst of the Great Depression, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Or Abraham Lincoln, appealing to, "the better angels of our nature," and urging northern and southern citizens to act, "with malice towards none, and charity to all ..." Or think of John F. Kennedy, the youngest president marking a new era of civil service and compelling people to, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but you can do for your country."



This passage from Luke is Jesus' inaugural address, of sorts. Now Jesus has been teaching, but we don't know what it's been like. He's probably been getting his feet wet, figuring out how to capture a crowd as he interprets scripture.

Luke lets the story unfold before our eyes. And the way he tells it pulls us in. We see Jesus stand up surrounded by the crowd. We see him unroll that scroll. We see him run his fingers across the lines until he gets to just the right place. And then we hear him opening his mouth to hear him speak those first words of his public ministry. And what do those words tell us about what is important to him, about what he is going to do? Let's hear them again: Jesus reads: ¹⁸*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

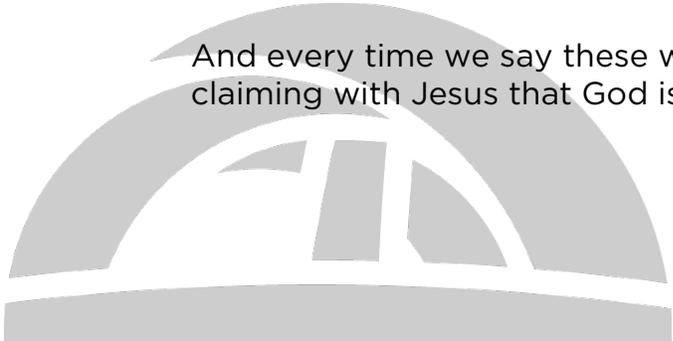
Now we don't know if he chose these words from Isaiah, or if they were chosen for him. We do know that by the 1st century there was a lectionary of sorts, that the practice of gathering to listening to scripture read and interpreted was common. And yet, given the mix of verses, (this reading is a little bit of a mash-up of Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 58) we have a clue that Jesus sought this message out. And what do we learn?

First, we learn that the Spirit is involved. The whole Gospel of Luke is framed by what the Spirit is up to - the changes that are coming, the good news that is preached, the attention and reclamation for those on the margins - all that is done with the help and power of the Holy Spirit.

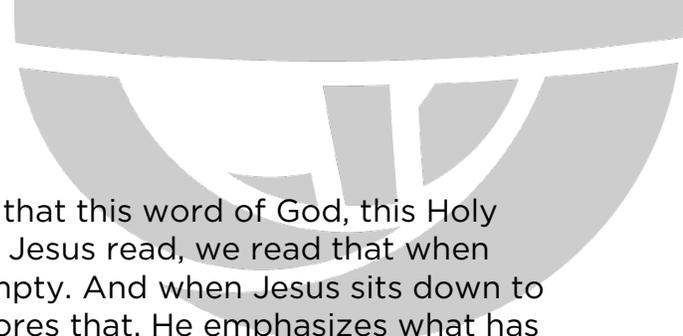
And second, we learn that it is not just about thoughts and prayers - it's about words and actions. Jesus is here to bring good news to every one of God's children who is bound up, pressed down, broken in spirit, impoverished, imprisoned, and desperately hungry for good news. [cite: Pr. Elizabeth Johnson]

So, having heard these words, and knowing what is important to Jesus, my question for you is this: **Where is the Spirit of the Lord upon you these days?** If you were giving an inaugural address for your faith journey, where are you feeling nudged to make things right in God's kingdom?

I invite you to do something courageous: Say it out loud, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Come on. Do it. You are watching in the comfort of your own home. No one can hear you. And ok, so what if they CAN hear you? That's precisely the point here. We believe that the word of God does something. It is alive and evocative and contextual.



And every time we say these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," we are claiming with Jesus that God is up to something, and that we are a part of it.



See, what Jesus knew – and Luke knew too – is that this word of God, this Holy Spirit, makes things happen. Later in Isaiah that Jesus read, we read that when the Word of God goes out it does not return empty. And when Jesus sits down to start interpreting what he has read, he underscores that. He emphasizes what has just happened right in their midst.

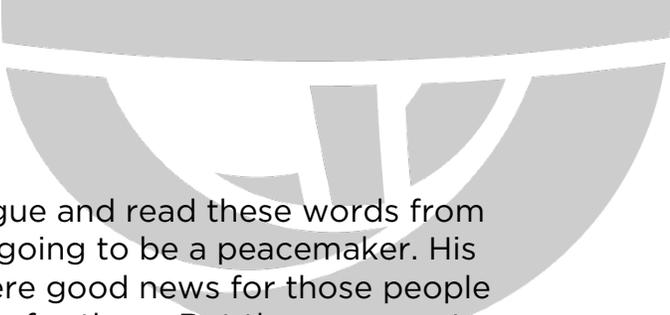
Jesus says – in Greek, it’s actually a present tense – “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Right now it is being fulfilled, and God is doing something. He doesn’t say, “it’s fulfilled in my speaking.” No – this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Those who hear these words share in the responsibility of bringing them to bear in the world.

So I ask you again: what is the Spirit of the Lord putting upon you right now? Friends, to answer that question you might need to stop and be still, and listen to your heart. There is a lot of noise in our world right now. But there might be a word or phrase from this passage that is tugging at you. You may be feeling called to quiet that noise. Perhaps what is speaking to you is the prayer of St. Francis: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. And if that’s where the Spirit is calling you right now, then claim it, and live it. Lord knows the world needs more peace, more humility, more mercy. No act of kindness is ever wasted, friends. Every gesture of love leaves an indelible mark, no matter how small, on this world. We need those acts, those gestures.

But if we learn anything from Jesus it is that the Holy Spirit does not just dabble in acts of peace and tranquility. As I was thinking of the Prayer of St. Francis, I recently came across the ‘inverse’ of that prayer. The author is unknown, but it sure sounds an awful lot like Jesus:

*Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.
Where there is apathy, let me provoke;
Where there is compliance, let me bring questioning;
Where there is silence, may I be a voice.
Where there is too much comfort and too little action, bring disruption;
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked, grant the willingness to listen.
When laws dictate and pain is overlooked ...
When tradition speaks louder than need ...
Grant that I may seek to justice rather than to talk about it.
Disturb us, O Lord.
To be with, as well as for, the alienated;
To love the unlovable, as well as the lovely;
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance. Amen.*





My friends, when Jesus stood up in that synagogue and read these words from Isaiah I have no doubt he knew he was not only going to be a peacemaker. His words were prophetic and provocative. They were good news for those people who needed desperately to believe that God was for them. But they were not comforting words for everyone. Sometimes when the Spirit puts things on our heart it makes life difficult. But my friends, Jesus knew that his ministry was not acting alone. He knew God was in him and through and with him, and the Spirit would guide him.

This week, may that be your prayer: Lord, whatever it is that you are putting upon my heart, give me the courage to act on it, in your name. Amen.

